

UK Prime Minister Cameron launches fresh attack on European Union migrants

Robert Stevens
1 December 2014

Friday's speech by UK Prime Minister David Cameron outlined a further raft of measures to make social pariahs of immigrants should the Conservatives form the next government after the 2015 election.

Cameron had previously proposed a cap on the number of European Union (EU) migrants allowed to enter the UK, or an "emergency brake" on further migration—in part in order to outflank the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and to mobilise his own right-wing in the Conservative Party.

Due to pressure from German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who said this would contravene the formal EU policy of the free movement of labour, Cameron was forced to backtrack.

Cameron said he accepted "the principle of free movement of workers is a key to being part of the single market. A market from which Britain has benefited enormously. So we do not want to destroy that principle or turn it on its head."

However, his speech still introduced measures scapegoating immigrants to the UK that will deny thousands access to welfare, housing and other social rights.

Speaking at the Staffordshire plant of industrial equipment manufacturer JCB, Cameron stated, "Our welfare system is unusual in Europe. It pays out before you pay into it ... This is about saying: our welfare system is like a national club."

He proposed measures including stopping EU migrants from claiming in-work benefits, such as tax credits, and getting access to social housing for four years. They will be prevented from claiming child benefit for dependents living outside the UK. EU jobseekers in the UK will be stopped from claiming the new all-in-one Universal Credit benefit being introduced throughout Britain.

"We will do this within existing EU law," said Cameron. "So instead of £600, they will get nothing."

Migrants will be removed from the UK after six months if they have not found work.

These moves will impact on an estimated 400,000 EU workers currently receiving one or another of the benefits during their first four years in Britain. Migrants will not be allowed to bring non-EU family members into the UK. The measures will also prevent citizens from new EU entrant nations working in the UK until their economies have "converged more closely" with existing member states.

Cameron said the already brutal regime for deporting immigrants would be tightened up. "Licences from colleges and businesses which fail to do enough to prevent large numbers of migrants they sponsor from overstaying their visas" will be revoked, he said. The government will extend "our new policy of 'deport first, appeal later' to cover all immigration appeals where a so-called right to family life is invoked."

Summing up, he said, "EU migrants should have a job offer before they come here. UK taxpayers will not support them if they don't. And once they are in work, they won't get benefits or social housing from Britain unless they have been here for at least four years."

The moves would give Britain the "toughest system" in Europe on migrant benefits, Cameron said.

As with all previous attacks on the social and political rights of immigrants, before long these will be used as a battering ram to demand far deeper inroads into the wages and social services of workers already residing in Britain.

Cameron's measures are indeed compatible with EU procedures and rules, as he maintains. His speech was framed in this way after discussion with Merkel and EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

Merkel heads the leading export-led economy in the European Union, with its ruling elite having benefited the most from the EU's policy of free movement of labour and capital. Germany therefore cannot be seen to openly abrogate this "principle" by discriminating against the new accession countries, including Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and Hungary. But at the same time Merkel has made clear that Germany is more than ready to impose its own measures against "benefit tourism" and to ally with the UK on this basis.

Last month the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that Germany could refuse to provide social welfare to migrants from other EU states if they are not actively seeking work. The grand chamber in Luxembourg argued that the ban on discrimination within the EU did not apply to social welfare claims and EU foreign nationals could be excluded from claiming social welfare. The judgement stated explicitly that the "EU citizens' guidelines", supposedly granting EU citizens the right to move freely and reside within the territorial area of the member states, does not apply to migrants dependent on social welfare. It claimed social welfare need not mean immediate expulsion from the country, but did allow a member state to refuse to extend the right to reside.

More is at stake for Cameron than agreement on anti-immigrant measures. He is seeking an economic and political alliance with Germany as the two nations most committed to and associated with the EU's pro-free market agenda and the imposition of savage austerity measures against the working class throughout the continent.

Appeals for agreement with Germany are routinely coupled with attacks on France, Italy and the southern Mediterranean countries as being laggards when it comes to imposing austerity and meeting cuts targets. In his speech Cameron made another reference to "France breaching its budget deficit limit."

Earlier this month, Boris Johnson, the Tory mayor of London who is widely tipped as a future party leader, said of Germany, "We are close allies in our vision for a free-trade Europe, for reducing bureaucracy, for reducing the wastefulness, all that kind of thing. They need us as a counterpoise to the French and the Mediterranean economies and their way of doing things."

Even so, Cameron may still prove unable to placate

his own right wing, who are not prepared to reach any compromise with the EU and are demanding the UK's withdrawal. Two Tory MP's have already defected to UKIP on this basis.

In response to his speech, the *Sun*, owned by billionaire Rupert Murdoch, said, "His [Cameron] stance makes sense in the horse-trading of EU politics. It makes less sense to voters, who will see anything short of regaining border controls as a cop-out."

Cameron may also alienate potential political allies within the EU among the rightist leaderships of Eastern Europe and the Baltic states—or at least make things more difficult for them.

One such figure is Donald Tusk, the former Polish prime minister and close ally of the United States who supports Britain and Germany's pro-austerity agenda for Europe. Speaking to the *Financial Times* last week, Tusk said that a UK exit from the EU, "will not only be a question of the European Union. It could be, as a final result, the greatest crisis of our Western civilisation as a whole."

This week Tusk is to take over as president of the European Council and will be in charge of chairing EU summits. In this position he will play a lead role in the UK's moves to renegotiate the terms of its EU membership.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact